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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000664

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SUBJECT: RIOTS IN BOKE OVER THE WEEKEND

REF: CONAKRY 0651

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. There were prolonged riots in Boke over the weekend after negotiations between the GoG and the local population failed to produce an acceptable agreement. Rioters attacked buildings owned by prominent government officials and one youth was killed when security forces intervened to restore order. President Conte visited the region on November 2 with a contingent of soldiers, reportedly chastising the local elders for failing to "control the youths." As of Monday morning, the city was calm and people were going about business as usual. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Negotiations between the GoG, the Guinean Bauxite Company (CBG), and the local population in the Boke region reportedly failed on October 31, sparking large-scale, violent demonstrations throughout the regional capital city (also called Boke) over the weekend. The continued lack of reliable electrical power and access to potable water has sparked numerous protests over the past few months. The local population had been threatening renewed protest activity if the GoG did not take action by October 31 (reftel).

¶3. (SBU) Youths took to the streets in Boke on October 31, erecting road and railroad barricades. Early in the evening, rioters destroyed a building owned by controversial millionaire Mamadou Syllah, who had been attempting to broker an agreement between the various parties. The GoG evacuated Syllah to Conakry by helicopter. Rioters also attacked the private residence of the president of the National Assembly, Aboubacar Sompore. However, Sompore's neighbors reportedly intervened and prevented the rioters from completely destroying the property, although they made off with some stolen loot. Both Syllah and Sompore are prominent citizens originally from Boke, who are closely identified with the current regime and the ruling Party for Unity and Progress (PUP).

¶4. (SBU) According to a contact within the local electoral commission, one youth was killed when security forces intervened to restore order. Initial reports indicated that a woman and an infant were killed, but were later determined to be inaccurate.

¶5. (SBU) President Conte skipped the army's 50th anniversary celebration (septel), instead traveling to Boke with a convoy of four trucks of soldiers. According to several sources, Conte met with the local Council of Elders in order to "calm the situation." The president reportedly told the elders that he held them personally responsible for the actions of the region's youth, chastising them for not keeping their children under control. Sources also said that Conte told them that was particularly disappointed that such behavior was taking place in Boke, a region in which he did not "expect to be contradicted." (COMMENT. Boke is

predominantly Soussou and several Conte allies are from the region, including First Lady Henriette Conte. END COMMENT).

¶6. (SBU) As of Monday morning, local contacts reported that the situation in Boke is calm. The railroad is clear and CBG is operating normally. Civil society leaders are reportedly demanding the release of four youths being held by local authorities. Contacts said that the local Council of Elders are talking to youth leaders and encouraging them to remain calm and to respect the law. Civil society leaders are reportedly encouraging youths to return looted property to local mosques without fear of repercussion. Businesses are open and traffic is circulating as normal.

¶7. (SBU) The city and surrounding villages reportedly remain without power and water. According to contacts, the GoG promised to install a new "power station" before the end of the year. CBG offered to install the station, but specified that it would deduct the costs from the revenue it pays to the GoG.

COMMENT

¶8. (SBU) The situation in Boke appears calm for the time being. The attacks targeting Mamadou Syllah and Aboubacar Sompore may reflect a general dissatisfaction with local leaders in particular, and the PUP in general. Until the electricity and water problems are resolved, the region is likely to experience continued bouts of civil unrest. END

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COMMENT.
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